



**Kirschke: Iditarod racer.**

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**N**IGHTS that couldn't have been darker. Temperatures of minus 30 degrees. Terrain appearing the same in every direction — nothing but snow and swirling, screaming winds.

The bleak world of high tundra near Nome, Alaska, is where **MSG Jon Kirschke** — a parachute instructor at Yuma Proving Ground, Ariz.'s, Military Free Fall School — found himself while participating in Alaska's Iditarod trail race.

Kirschke finished the 1,100-mile race in 15 days and five hours, for the most part, alone — and on his bike. "One minute I felt like I was on top of the world, the next, I was counting the minutes and just praying for the pain to end," he said. "Riding along the lonely Yukon River, I made great time for the first 70 miles until dark."

During the night the temperature dropped dramatically, Kirschke said. "That's when the trip got challenging. Riding at night down a river that is over half a mile wide is so monotonous. I found myself getting delirious, weaving in and out of the trail. It's pretty much hard-packed snow from snowmobile traffic, but once you veer off it, you find yourself buried in thigh-high snow."

He completed the 150 miles down the Yukon in 27

hours. "I pulled into Kaltag, which is the end of the stretch down the Yukon, totally exhausted. After about six hours of sleep, I had probably my best day of riding, covering the 90 miles to Unalakleet, on the coast, in just over 12 hours."

Before this particular race, only 10 athletes had accomplished the trek without the aid of dogs or snowmobiles, Kirschke said. The first official human-powered race across the entire trail allowed racers to be self-supported and "human-powered," which means they could bike, ski or travel on foot.

The race started in Knik, near Anchorage, and continued across the Alaska Mountain Range and northwest to McGrath. From there, the trail ran due north, to Ruby, and 150 miles on the Yukon River before veering west to Unalakleet and up along the coast to Nome.

Ten resupply points allowed Kirschke to mail general delivery packages ahead to himself. He carried everything else on his bike.

"The only mechanical trouble I had was a flat tire about 400 miles into the race," said Kirschke, who was fortunate to have relatively good weather for most of the race.

"Snow for two days early on forced participants to walk 70 miles over the Alaska Range," Kirschke said. He walked a total of about 150 miles before completing the race.

One of the most difficult parts of the trip was a 200-mile stretch between McGrath and Ruby, where there are virtually no inhabitants. "It took me three days to complete that stretch and I hadn't packed enough supplies. I ran out of fuel for my stove about halfway through and twice had to build a fire to melt snow for drinking water. I also ran out of food and pulled into Ruby tired and famished. It was during that stretch I started wondering what I had gotten myself into."

The event actually consists of two races. The first 350 miles to McGrath is called the "Iditasport Extreme," in which 38 athletes participated. Thirteen continued on from McGrath to Nome, officially called the "Iditasport Impossible."

Kirschke finished second in both races. His total prize for both events was \$1,300, a fraction of what it cost to participate. "But no amount of money can be worth the experience," said Kirschke, who took up endurance racing several years ago. "I had



**Davila (right): Lifesaver.**

wanted to race the Extreme for awhile, then when they announced they were going to have a race across the entire trail, I couldn't pass it up.

"This was truly the most incredible thing I've ever attempted — utterly fantastic," he said. "Competing in an event like this teaches you a lot about yourself. It's about exploring your limits. A lot of people think, 'Oh, I could never do something like that.' You'd be surprised what you can accomplish if you put your mind to it." — *Marcella Chavez, YPG Public Affairs Office*

**S**GT Erineo Davila was surrounded by gasoline, but his concern for the life of an injured motorcyclist kept him from leaving the accident scene.

Davila and **SGT Charles Burkett**, both assigned to Special Operations Command, Europe, were returning to Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany, in an Army vehicle when they saw plumes of black smoke upon entering Autobahn 8, Davila said.

The German police reported that a car had clipped a motorcyclist, then collided with a tractor-trailer transporting lumber. The tractor-trailer flipped onto its side and spilled lumber all over the autobahn.

Davila and Burkett parked their vehicle at an angle to stop traffic and rushed to the crushed Audi, to find it empty. Then they aided the motorcyclist who was lying in a ditch with his face submerged in a pool of water.

Davila lifted the man's head from the water and checked his breathing, while Burkett checked for injuries. One of the man's legs was nearly severed, Burkett said. As Davila held the man, urging him not to move, Burkett used his uniform belt to make a tourniquet.

"The victim was trying to move, and I remember just telling him to remain steady so he wouldn't injure himself further," Davila said.

As the two performed first aid, gas spewed from the motorcycle's broken gas hose, drenching the injured man and mixing with the water in the ditch. Davila prayed nothing would spark an explosion at the site.

A crowd had gathered at the scene as a local emergency medical-evacuation helicopter arrived and Davila and Burkett helped move the victim onto a stretcher.

Feeling they couldn't do any more, the two soldiers headed back to their installation. They learned later that the motorcyclist survived, but the accident cost him his leg.

Davila received the Soldier's Medal for his decisive, life-saving actions. "I'm just happy I was there

to offer some assistance because I really believe, had we not been there, the man would have bled to death." — *Headquarters, U.S. European Command PAO*

**S**SG Olanda Anderson, a Fort Carson, Colo., soldier and member of the Army's World-Class Athlete Program, secured a spot on the 2000 U.S. Olympic Boxing Team with his performance in April at the Central America Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Tijuana, Mexico.

He won three bouts to claim the position as the 178-pound light heavyweight who will represent the United States at the Summer Games in Sydney, Australia.

Earlier, Anderson won the 178-pound championship at the U.S. Olympic Boxing Team Trials in February in Tampa, Fla., but two weeks later was defeated twice by Michael Simms at the U.S. Olympic Box-offs at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Conn.

That gave Simms the Olympic contender's berth and placed Anderson in the alternate spot.

That all changed on April 14 when USA Boxing officials released Simms from Team USA for repeatedly missing curfew and failing to obey coach Tom Mustin's instructions during training camp in Colorado Springs and at the America's qualifier in Tampa.

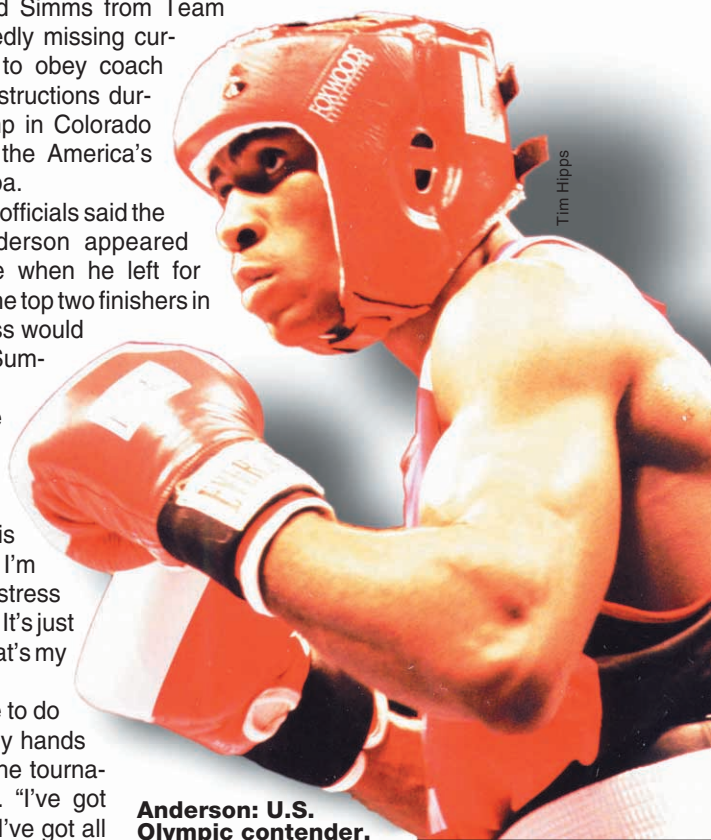
USA Boxing officials said the 29-year-old Anderson appeared ready to rumble when he left for Tijuana, where the top two finishers in each weight class would advance to the Summer Games.

Before the competition, Anderson said: "I'm going to approach it like this is a regular bout. I'm not going to let it stress me out anymore. It's just another fight. That's my new attitude."

"All I have to do is just box, let my hands go," he said of the tournament in Mexico. "I've got the experience. I've got all the tools. I just have to start applying them."

"If I don't get a medal, people will always say, 'What if Simms had gone?'" Anderson said. "Now, I've got to concentrate on getting a medal at the Olympics — a gold medal, preferably." — *Tim Hipps, Belvoir Eagle*

*Anderson secured a spot on the 2000 U.S. Olympic Boxing Team with his performance in April.*



**Anderson: U.S. Olympic contender.**

